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Does /e/ split into four vowel phonemes in Western Almeria? Effects of /s/, /r/, and /θ/ deletion in this variety of Eastern Andalusian Spanish

Abstract

As documented by several scholars, such as Wulff (1889) and Navarro Tomás (1938), Eastern Andalusian Spanish (henceforth EAS), neutralises most consonants in coda position. However, there is no consensus on the effects that consonant deletion has on surrounding vowels. Researchers of EAS, such as Mondéjar Cumpián (1979), have distinguished between two types of vowels in this variety of Spanish: vowels in coda position and vowels followed by a deleted consonant. However despite the neutralisation of most consonants in coda position in EAS, phonemic value has only been given to vowels preceding deleted /s/, as in Salvador Caja (1950) and Carlson (2012).

This paper expands on the traditional view on vowel doubling in EAS and shows evidence of a more complex phenomenon previously undescribed: the division of /e/ into different phonemes as a result of different consonant deletion. This paper will analyse the differences between word-final /e/ and /e/ preceding deleted word-final /s/, /r/, and /θ/ (/es/, /er/, and /eθ/, respectively) in order to determine if the deletion of these consonants causes consistent changes of quality to /e/, thus creating a new system of mid front vowels.

Keywords

almeria, spanish, western, andalusian, phonemes, vowel, four, into, split, e, does, eastern, variety, this, deletion, r, effects

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Does /e/ split into four vowel phonemes in Western Almeria? Effects of /s/, /r/, and /θ/ deletion in this variety of Eastern Andalusian Spanish.

Alfredo Herrero de Haro (Wollongong)

As documented by several scholars, such as Wulff (1889) and Navarro Tomás (1938), Eastern Andalusian Spanish (henceforth *EAS*), neutralises most consonants in coda position. However, there is no consensus on the effects that consonant deletion has on surrounding vowels. Researchers of EAS, such as Mondéjar Cumpián (1979), have distinguished between two types of vowels in this variety of Spanish: vowels in coda position and vowels followed by a deleted consonant. However despite the neutralisation of most consonants in coda position in EAS, phonemic value has only been given to vowels preceding deleted /s/, as in Salvador Caja (1950) and Carlson (2012).

This paper expands on the traditional view on vowel doubling in EAS and shows evidence of a more complex phenomenon previously undescribed: the division of /e/ into different phonemes as a result of different consonant deletion. This paper will analyse the differences between word-final /e/ and /e/ preceding deleted word-final /s/, /r/, and /θ/ (/e^s/, /e^r/, and /e^θ/, respectively) in order to determine if the deletion of these consonants causes consistent changes of quality to /e/, thus creating a new system of mid front vowels.

Once it has been established whether the deletion of /s/, /r/, and /θ/ creates a new set of vowels, a perception analysis will be carried out to determine if native speakers of EAS from Western Almeria can distinguish between /e/, /e^s/, /e^r/, and /e^θ/, which will confirm whether those new vowels have allophonic or phonemic value.

An analysis of the F1 and F2 of /e/, /e^s/, /e^r/, and /e^θ/ pronounced by native speakers of Western Almeria reading a text and during free speech shows that /e/ presents some consistent F1 and F2 values depending on whether it is in coda or whether it precedes /s/, /r/, or /θ/ deletion. Furthermore, the perception tests completed by native speakers of the area show some ability to distinguish between some of those vowels, although some contrasts are more clearly distinguished than others.

These findings show that, as Alarcos Llorach (1950: 122) explained, the evolution of a system means that some distinctions are lost, but the system develops other ways of solving ambiguity. In this case, EAS, or at least in Western Almeria, vowel quality is used to mark whether /s/, /r/, or /θ/ has been deleted after /e/, thus creating a new set of mid front vowels in this variety of Spanish. The results of the perception test show that speakers of this variety of Spanish have developed a complex mid front vowel phonemic system, as they show an ability to distinguish between various realisations of /e/ which had been previously described as allophones. A preliminary analysis of additional data suggests a similar situation for at least /o/ and /a/, which would increase dramatically the 8-10 vowel phoneme system traditionally attributed to Eastern Andalusian Spanish.

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